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ABSTRACT

A day and a half meeting of executive directors and staff of 11 members of the National Association of Child Advocates (NACA) was convened at the request of Kansas Action for Children to inform its efforts to build a constituency for children in Kansas. Child advocates are increasingly recognizing the need to build and mobilize constituencies for children and are working to develop new and effective approaches toward this goal. The NACA has undertaken a range of efforts to assist child advocates in identifying successful approaches to constituency building and in identifying the components necessary for success. Meeting participants described their own community mobilization efforts and discussed the factors they deemed essential for effective campaigns to increase community involvement. (Two appendices provide summaries of constituency building efforts in 12 states or cities, the NACA role in supporting constituency efforts, and a list of web sites for participating organizations.) (KB)

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Building a Constituency for Children: A Discussion Among Child Advocates

A Report on a Meeting Held May 18 and 19, 1998, in Kansas City
To Assist Kansas Action for Children in its Planning Process
Supported by the Kauffman Foundation

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An Introduction to the National Association of Child Advocates

The National Association of Child Advocates (NACA) is the only national association devoted to creating and sustaining professional state and local child advocacy organizations. Founded in 1984, NACA represents and supports a nationwide network of multi-issue child advocacy organizations working at the increasingly critical level of America's statehouses, county commissions, and city councils.

With 57 member organizations in 42 states and 11 cities and communities, NACA serves as the forum where child advocacy leaders from across the country convene to share ideas and exchange information, formulate joint efforts and coordinated strategies, sharpen their skills, and increase the impact of the child advocacy movement. NACA establishes links between state and local advocates and national experts and provides a national clearinghouse for information about effective advocacy and issues affecting children.

Recognition of NACA's leadership role in the child advocacy community has been confirmed by a growth of NACA membership by more than 40 percent since early 1995. NACA's member organizations are:

- Citizen-based, non-profit, independent child advocacy organizations receiving little or no public funding. They answer to no one but the children.
- Multi-issue organizations that view the child as a whole, knowing that children need all the pieces of the puzzle—food, shelter, security, education, health care—to grow up strong and productive.
- Advocates, not direct service providers. They educate decision makers on children's programs, collect data on the status of children and the operation of children's programs, inform the public and the media about children's issues, and litigate on behalf of children when necessary.
- Diverse, reflecting and responding to different community needs and facing different priorities.

NACA's member organizations provide critical leadership on children's issues in their states and localities. Many lead broad-based coalitions that address the serious issues arising from rapid transformation in programs critical to children's well-being, such as welfare reform, managed health care, and child protective services reform. Others are engaged in active partnerships with educators, service providers, health professionals, and others to improve the status of children and families. Still, others are leading the fight for improvements and expansions in public programs serving this country's most vulnerable children.

To support its member organizations, NACA provides a range of services, including timely information on critical issues affecting children and families, national conferences and regional training opportunities that enable child advocates to gain knowledge and augment skills, and individualized technical assistance that is tailored to the needs of state and local child advocacy organizations. NACA also provides organizational development assistance in areas such as board development, program building, and fundraising.

Additional information about the National Association of Child Advocates and its member organizations can be obtained from NACA's website at ***www.childadvocacy.org*** *or by contacting NACA at the address below.*

Building A Constituency For Children:
A Discussion Among Child Advocates

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Building a Constituency for Children: A Discussion Among Child Advocates

This report summarizes a day and a half meeting[1] of executive directors and staff of eleven members of the National Association of Child Advocates (NACA)[2], convened at the request of Kansas Action for Children to inform its efforts to build a constituency for children in Kansas. Participants described their own community mobilization efforts and discussed the factors they deemed essential for effective campaigns to increase community involvement.

Child advocates are increasingly recognizing the need to build and mobilize constituencies for children, and are working to develop new and effective approaches toward this goal. NACA has undertaken a range of efforts to assist child advocates in identifying successful approaches to constituency building. The foundation community has also expressed interest in supporting such work, and in understanding what components are necessary for success. We are providing this report in the hope that it will provide NACA members and child advocates with a starting point to further their efforts to broaden the base for child advocacy in their communities.[3]

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[1] This meeting was held May 18 and 19, 1998, in Kansas City, Missouri. It was funded by the Kaufman Foundation, which has also supported the production of this report, and was intended to support the planning process that Kansas Action for Children has undertaken preliminary to entering upon a five-year effort to expand the community base for supporting advocacy for children. It was also hoped that this meeting would assist those present, and all NACA members, in their community mobilization efforts. Subsequent to this meeting, the Children's Partnership released a report, *Exploring Constituency-Building Strategies for Children's Issues: What's Working*, October, 1998, that reaches some of the same conclusions discussed in this report. It is available online at www.childrenspartnership.org/pub/schrayer/schrayer_report1.html.

[2] NACA member participants included: Judy Watts, President and CEO of Agenda for Children in Louisiana; Margaret Brodkin, Executive Director of Coleman Advocates for Children in San Francisco, California; Shelly Yanoff, Executive Director, Philadelphia Citizens for Children & Youth; Beth Griffin, Executive Director, Citizens for Missouri's Children; Gary Brunk, Executive Director, Kansas Action for Children; Shannon La Shell, Project Director, Kansas Action for Children; Jann Jackson, Executive Director, Advocates for Children & Youth; Jetta Bernier, Executive Director, Massachusetts Committee for Children and Youth; Reggie Dorsey, Community Outreach Coordinator, Association for Children of New Jersey; Julie Rehder, Senior Director, National and Community Partnerships, North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute; Roy Miller, Campaign Director, Florida Children's Campaign; Melissa Freel, Coordinator of Community Advocacy, Michigan' Children. Also present were: Susan Kynes, Alabama Partnership for Children; Tamara Lucas Copeland, President, NACA; Deborah Stein, Devolution Project Director, NACA; and Nancy Sconyers, Budget Project Director, NACA. The sessions were moderated by Tony Mendez, of the Kauffman Foundation.

[3] Deborah Stein served as the reporter for the meeting. Any misstatements or failure to include positions and perspectives are solely hers.

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Executive Summary

Over the course of the meeting, several points of consensus developed.

First, all participants agreed that constituency building requires lots of resources – in staff, time, money, and often in infrastructure because successful constituency building is based on extensive one-on-one contact and relationship building. Most participants agreed that foundations often significantly underestimate the resources needed for successful constituency building. (On the other hand, the investment of time and resources can bring benefits for years to come; one participant noted that years after they had ceased any formal relationship with local groups, a number of them were still working effectively at both the local and state level.) One implication is that state-based child advocacy organizations which seek to mobilize a state-wide constituency simply cannot afford to undertake traditional community organizing. The resources necessary to organize even a small state, community- by-community, make such an approach prohibitive. Instead, state-based child advocates use a variety of other approaches to mobilize on behalf of children. These efforts include working with established grass-roots organizations, developing state-wide networks and campaigns, and media approaches targeting sympathetic voters. City-based groups, or state groups that have chosen to focus on one or two large cities, can afford to undertake efforts that more nearly approach traditional community organizing.

A second issue in community mobilizing is the tension between maintaining a low organizational profile in order to move a coalition effort forward, and the need to be able to identify the exact importance of the role played by the organization in order to build the organization's financial base and membership. This tension can be articulated as the difference between trying to build a constituency for children, and trying to build a constituency for the child advocacy organization.

A third area of importance is the need for more sophisticated approaches to evaluating the success of child advocacy efforts to build constituencies. The difficulty of evaluating advocacy is a perennial problem for child advocates. They often feel compelled to choose between using process indicators and outcome indicators. Process indicators, while reliable measures of whether the organization has completed the work it undertook, do not provide any information about whether children benefitted as a result. Outcome indicators, on the other hand, are difficult to assess because most policy changes require multiple actors and the role of the child advocate may be difficult to assess. Furthermore, identifying outcome indicators can be risky because real improvements in children's lives may be masked by other changes outside the advocates' control, such as changes in the economy.

A fourth point of agreement is that the "disenfranchised" are a particularly difficult group to mobilize. Low income families have so many immediate issues to address that finding time or energy for more long-term efforts that may not directly affect their lives immediately can be a low priority. Low income families have also seen policy initiatives come and go, without ever making a concrete difference in their lives. And, they often have a high level of distrust for people outside their community, because of prior negative experiences with bureaucracy.

However, when the disenfranchised are truly engaged, they can have significant impact on policy, and the involvement of the community can itself be an important goal.

Fifth, there was a consensus that finding and maintaining appropriate software to track a membership was critical. Participants acknowledged that maintaining such a database is very time-consuming and therefore demanding of resources. They identified a number of features necessary in good software for maximum benefit.

Sixth, participants agreed that the context and the issue dictate the strategy for choosing constituents. While they identified a range of models for selecting issues and strategies, all acknowledged that appropriate strategies would vary depending on, among other factors, political environment, geography, the media market, the child advocacy community and the level of community organization already in place.

Introduction

NACA members[4] present at this meeting had diverse opinions about the goals, opportunities, and approaches for successful constituency building. The participants work in a variety of political settings. Their opinions and approaches to constituency building generally are shaped by their environments. Some of the critical factors they identified in their choices of strategies include whether they work at the city or state level, size of geographic area, number of media markets, political climate, and the size of the child advocacy community. The constituency building efforts of each of these members are described in the appendix; those summaries may illuminate the discussion which follows.

On some of the topics considered, there were as many answers as participants, but the group did identify critical questions which can provide a checklist for children's advocates to consider when designing and launching a constituency building effort for their state. Those questions include:[5]

- Who are some important target audiences?
- How should target audiences be selected?
- What are effective strategies for reaching targeted communities, and what dictates choice of strategy?
- Should child advocates limit themselves to policy advocacy or broaden their goals to increase community involvement in the lives of kids?
- How are child advocates using technology in their constituency building efforts?
- What level and kind of staff support is required?
- How do you sustain constituent involvement?
- How do you evaluate constituency building?

Who are some important target audiences?

There were significant disagreements over which individuals and groups should be the target of a constituency building effort. Possible targets that were identified included:

- neutral or uninvolved community members–sometimes described in the discussion as "Joe and Jane". Another way to define this target constituency is "people who care but don't know what to do about it".
- the faithful – those individuals who are already active on behalf of children.

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[4] See footnote 2 for a list of NACA member participants.

[5] Additional questions that were raised but not discussed included: how to talk to the community about what is on their minds and then how to ask them to support a predetermined agenda (these may be internally contradictory approaches); when, how and who changes the agenda; should a child advocacy organization try to develop the illusion of power (thirty phone calls at the right moment) or really build power; should a child advocacy organization try to build its organizational constituency or a constituency for kids.

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- the "spoken for" – the families most affected by policy issues, typically poor and disenfranchised.
- voters.
- politicians.

While there was some discussion about the value of trying to reach those who are opposed to or unconcerned about children's issues, ultimately a consensus developed that reaching this group is simply too difficult. The amount of time, money and effort needed to identify these individuals, educate them about the issues, and try to change their beliefs, is large, and the reward in converting them is often not commensurate. At least in the current stage of building a children's constituency, there are enough people who fit one of the groups described above who can be mobilized more effectively at less cost.

Kansas Action for Children identified the groups they wanted to reach in Kansas–Joe and Jane, politicians, the faithful, and the disenfranchised. A roundtable discussion ensued on the best way to reach each group given Kansas' particular environment.

Joe and Jane

In Kansas, Joe and Jane are perhaps the single most important target for constituency building; this group will support children's issues if they are framed correctly. In Kansas, they are middle income, largely white, who tend to vote Republican but support centrist politics. Which candidate they support and how they vote depends on how the issue is framed; therefore, their support is contested terrain. The goal for Kansas Action for Children is to get these people working with and for kids at the community level, willing to run for office, to support political issues and to vote based upon the candidate's positions on children's issues.

Some participants suggested that the true goal for child advocates should be to build a better power base–rather than stimulate community involvement with children as individuals. They felt that the latter work was more appropriately done by social workers and not child advocates. Given that goal, the targeted audience would be a small subset of the total group willing to be politically active. Others suggested that focusing solely on a power base will not change the political culture; that the Right succeeded in changing the political culture by building a power base "plus"–and the "plus" was offering opportunities to satisfy people's need for personal connection.

One participant pointed out that Joe and Jane -- particularly the working parents among them -- are so busy and overwhelmed that they may care, but not have the time to get involved. She suggested designing a community mobilizing campaign that permits them to get involved with a minimum of time–e.g., send out e-mail alerts that include e-mail addresses they can write to quickly.

Several participants suggested that it was important to offer a continuum of involvement opportunities. One participant suggested offering a menu of specific steps that could be taken. For example, to mobilize Joe and Jane to work to revive the dismantled safety net, pick two

items for each piece of the missing net, one requiring a smaller time commitment and one larger. Thus, the menu might suggest that if they want to help kids who are hungry, participate in a food drive and then propose something larger that might require a more sustained commitment. Another participant suggested a deeper layering of possible actions, starting with send money, then act on alerts, take questions to candidates, vote on children's issues, with the most involved being asked to participate in a children's advocacy institute.[6]

Another participant suggested that it was important to include an opportunity to contribute in everything the organization does. Rather than require a minimum commitment, let people build gradually the amount they are willing to do. Once they do something, ask them what else they are willing to do. Many said that people will also get more involved as they learn more about the organization and what it does. (Electronic tracking of everyone's involvement–how much money have they given, what else have they done–is critical to this approach.) Another participant, however, felt that it was important to just send information sometimes, and not always be asking for something.

One participant pointed out that it was important to start with a winnable issue and then build on a short range success. She suggested asking people what one thing they think government could do to make a difference, and selecting the winnable issue from those responses. She also suggested that it was important to have a diverse group, to foster dialogue. Another participant pointed out that if an organization sends out monthly alerts on different topics, it is important to follow up each alert with information about the outcomes; otherwise, people can get lost who never see the results of their efforts. It's important to show results in order to keep people involved.

One participant said that it is easy to get people to send in postcards; while a postcard campaign may be less effective than other actions, it is better than nothing, and may be a useful approach where communities are unlikely to invest greater time and energy.

To reach these "ordinary citizens", the first step is to let people know about the child advocacy organization and the issues it works on. Several participating organizations primarily relied upon the media for this. One state-wide organization has arranged to write a column in a parents' paper every other month; a city-based organization hosts a radio program and positions stories with newspaper columnists. Another organization had an advisory committee on media that had really worked well. It included corporate public relations people, and the committee served as resources for local child advocacy groups within the state. Another organization had also had great success working with a media advisory committee.

There was some discussion of the differences between local groups working to move constituencies to act on state-wide issues and state-wide groups working to organize local groups

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[6] A number of NACA members offer children's advocacy institutes or similar opportunities to child advocates within their states. These institutes provide training on policy issues and advocacy approaches, with the goal of improving community members' capacity to advocate for children.

from the state level. In either case, there was a consensus that this is slow, incremental work based upon building relationships.

The Disenfranchised

It was generally acknowledged that this is a particularly hard community to mobilize. For the disenfranchised, life is so difficult on a daily basis and immediate needs are so pressing that it is hard to spend time or energy on long term goals. It is also hard for members of this community to know when policy changes will really apply to them. And, they often have a high level of distrust of people outside their community, because of prior negative experiences with bureaucracy. Among participants at the meeting, only city-based organizations or state-based organizations that had chosen to focus on a few cities were working intensively with these communities. This may be in part because for the disenfranchised, especially, personal relationships are critical to community mobilization.

However, when the policy issues are translated well and messages are found that really engage this group, they can be incredibly mobilized. The issue must be immediate and specific, and there should be a specific solution. It is easier to gain credibility in this community if the organization has a sponsor or mentor to introduce it to the community such as a church, Headstart group, clinic or some other familiar group that is perceived by the community as helpful. This approach worked for one participant on a local level; the challenge now is to bring the same approach other communities around the state and then to get the groups to work on a state-wide level.

Another city-based participant has developed a cadre of leaders by paying stipends to parents in every neighborhood. The parents meet three hours a week for training and discussion and spend another three hours each week working in the community, for example providing child care. The stipend makes the parents feel appreciated. This organization began this approach with youth and then moved to parents; now these leaders have begun to testify at state hearings on welfare reform and have had enormous impact. These are relatively small groups–12 to 15 people at a time. The child advocacy organization staffs the project with one primary organizer but brings in speakers, provides media training and other support. It is not clear how to move this model to a state level approach; it might however be possible to use this model in a number of local communities and then network the communities.
A state-wide organization that conducts advocacy training keeps the focus on local projects and local partnerships; from time to time they may get local organizations to participate in state-wide activities, but they don't necessarily try to mobilize them state-wide.

One participant partners with an assets mapping group, which helps identify who in the community has particular skills–who can fix cars, hang drywall. Once the community is identified as having these sources of strength it is easier to move them to do other kinds of activities. Another participant concurred in the importance of assets mapping, but pointed out that it is also important to listen carefully to what the community wants–not to just come in and tell it what to do.

Politicians, Voters, and the "Faithful"

There was only limited discussion about how to reach politicians and the committed children's constituency. Child advocates have traditionally worked individually with politicians, and used information to sway their positions. Now child advocates are also seeking to reach politicians through self-interest by mobilizing voters (and campaign donors) around children's issues.[7] (See Florida and Massachusetts for examples of this approach.) While reaching a new constituency is important, participants emphasized that the more traditional audience for child advocates is also necessary. This group is easier to reach; they read newspapers, they understand children's issues, and they are willing to give money and act on behalf of kids.

How should target audiences be selected?

One area where strategic choice is important is in which communities to mobilize. Some considerations for target communities include whether a basic stakeholder group is in place already, where kids are doing the worst, and whether there is an issue to organize around that politically powerful communities can also support (i.e. whether there is a reasonable chance of success).

Many of the organizations present had developed specific strategies for selecting target audiences. One organization is working through state-wide coalitions and other interested organizations; they have identified 50 organizations of people that should care about kids (for instance, religious and professional groups) and are trying to get one member of each organization from each of the political districts in their state to join their state-wide child advocacy network. Several worked directly with the communities most affected. Another organization targets swing voters and community leaders. There is technology that organizations can use to identify frequent voters. In some states, information is also available identifying campaign donors. One member uses survey instruments such as polls; question people about which children's issues they would support either directly or through their taxes, and they can use that information to also solicit funds and political support.

Many participants suggested that the context of the constituency effort is critical: if the issue is child care, you need to reach out to one community, but if the issue is neighborhood safety you might need to reach out to a different constituency. The organization must decide how general or specific to be for any given issue. Thus, if the organization is seeking child care for middle and low income families, the target audience might be parents, guardians, teachers, Headstart workers. The question then becomes, should a child advocacy organization identify one issue at a time and build a target audience around that issue, then broaden out, or should they initially seek a broader audience? And if the latter, who should the broader base include police, business, liberals who aren't involved?

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[7] One participant had just created stickers that fit on checks, saying "I'm for kids and I vote", which supporters could put on all their political donation checks. While it was too soon to tell whether this approach had any impact, participants considered it promising.

What are good strategies for reaching constituencies, and what dictates choice of strategy?

One participant pointed out that it is much easier to get people to take political action around a local issue than a state or national issue. This suggests that constituency building is much easier at the local level.

The discussion of strategy revealed a split in approach; one group of participants suggested that to achieve broad support, it might be necessary to soften the language used (for example, not use the word "advocate") or to refrain from taking particular political positions. Other participants suggested that if you water down your message to "convert the heathen", you risk losing your most passionate supporters–or at least are less like to move them to action.

There was some discussion of the differences between local groups working to move constituencies to act on state-wide issues and state-wide groups working to organize local groups from the state level. In either case, there was a consensus that this is slow, incremental work based upon building relationships.

One approach for reaching the uninvolved business or community leader is to invite people to be on a board of advisors. It was suggested that while the "board member" approach can have immediate impact–you can change something with just one phone call–it doesn't create cultural change. If the organizational goal is to mobilize whole communities and create cultural change, then reaching a few board members will not suffice. Communities want more than just policy; they want an environment where people respond differently to children individually and that requires building public will.

Should child advocates limit themselves to policy advocacy or broaden their goals to increase community involvement in the lives of kids?

Member organizations differed in the actions that they wanted a broader constituency for children to take. A number of speakers either said they were working on non-policy matters (asset building, risk resiliency, assessments of neighborhoods) or were moving to it. Some participants saw this as feasible only at the community level.

One speaker pointed out that there is a decimated generation of adults that is incapable of effective parenting, and as a result kids will suffer. Policy advocates can't do the parenting that kids need, but someone has to or advocacy efforts for social change won't end up helping kids. Other members saw the child advocates' role as solely policy; the community-based work, in their view, was more like social work.

Again, this range of opinion would dictate strategy. For example, if the goal was to encourage seatbelt use, advocates who sought only policy remedies would work to encourage legislators to make seatbelt use mandatory, while advocates seeking to change the community as well might implement a media campaign that would encourage the public to change its behavior.

How are child advocates using technology in their constituency building efforts?

Database software for tracking members or constituency

There was a consensus that finding and maintaining appropriate software to track a membership was critical. An appropriate technology should allow the organization to track the individual's interests, levels of financial contribution, and participation in organization events. At least one participant tries to include both home and office information in the data base; that way, financial solicitations can be sent to the home but technical information can be sent to the office. (They send fax alerts to whichever location the member requests.) Home addresses are important where people are willing to divulge them because that also permits the organization to locate members who live in particular legislative districts. Some people are unwilling to give this information, however, so another organization gives the member a choice of providing home or office address.

Maintaining the database was commonly acknowledged to be time-consuming and difficult. Some of the suggestions for keeping it up to date, accurate and complete included:

- Include a database registration form in all notices and meeting announcements;
- Bring the forms to all meetings and appearances;
- Have one reliable and accurate person responsible for maintaining the data;
- Have a "clean up" day every six months where all staff are asked to review the data base and tag information which is out of data or duplicative (good software should make it easier to eliminate duplicates);
- Design the data base according to different target lists, so that it is easy to assemble mailings for particular targets.

One participant suggested the following sets of categories for the data base: community leaders, media, organization supporters (those who have shown up at the organization's or allies' events--this facilitates inviting them to meetings in their area), business leaders, and political contributors. In his state, the names of political contributors are on campaign finance reports which are available on-line, and they are trying to download that information directly into their data base without reentering it. Other participants suggested including elected officials, coalition members, donors, and funders.

Several participants knew of software that will identify a person's legislative district when their address is fed in. Other members added that one important feature of their database was the ability to sort and print by geographic area.

Fax or e-mails for alerts

Many members used technology to send out regular alerts. The two forms discussed were faxes and e-mails. One city-based member sends out a weekly fax alert to 800 individuals. (It goes less regularly when the city legislature is not in session, to avoid burning out members' interest.) Other participants use e-mail for their alerts. One nice feature of using e-mail is that it is

possible to embed a web site link in the e-mail, so that people can readily check out a relevant site. However, since many members may not have access to e-mail, some participants suggested that it was necessary to use multiple technologies to send the same alerts.

E-mails and list serves for peer to peer communications

One organization set up a server and blast e-mail system to facilitate communications between groups in different counties. They found this was more successful than posting information on a web site. This may have been partly because the information came to people's desks rather than requiring that people think to check the web site, but also because it was more private, and therefore people felt more comfortable sharing sensitive information. Another organization set up a small closed list serve for leading child advocates in the state.

Web Sites for broad dissemination of information and outreach

Many participants also have or are developing web sites; the focus and goal of their web sites vary.[8] Some of the functions that these web sites serve include providing calendars, posting petitions, and providing a way for people to join the organization. Many web sites give basic information about the condition of children in the state, or function as research tools for child advocates. One organization posts the e-mail addresses of a council of advisors; this way, people can contact the advisors directly with questions about substantive children's issues.

The biggest barrier to setting up a web site is cost. Several groups were funded through the Benton Foundation to run state-based web site for the Coalition for America's Children. Some organizations had a volunteer create their web site in one case, a knowledgeable Board member, in another, a local university student.

Other challenges in building effective web sites include publicizing the site adequately and updating it regularly.

Other technologies

Several participants have used video-conferencing in their mobilizing efforts. One has run a state-wide conference, using university extension services to host the video-conference in many sites. Another has used video-conferencing to release the KIDS COUNT book. The same participant has a database with information about over 2000 localities in her state; she can print out a fact sheet on any location in 10 minutes. This is useful for local organizing.

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[8] A list of web sites of all organizations participating in the meeting is included at the end of this report. Child advocacy organizations considering developing a web site are strongly encouraged to review these and other advocacy organization web sites in order to identify approaches that will fit their needs.

Benefits and drawbacks of using technology as a mobilizing tool

The use of technology permits child advocacy organizations to institutionalize their information so that many stakeholders, not just the professional child advocates, can use critical information. The use of e-mail to media greatly increases the chance that the media will use the information since they can copy it directly into their materials. Often they don't have the time to have it retyped. Many people, particularly voters, are moving toward getting more and more of their information electronically; according to one participant, by the year 2002 thirty-five percent of all voters will get the majority of their information electronically. Thus, using technology will be critical to reaching a core target group.

However, the big drawback of using technology to reach constituencies is that many people do not have access to technologies such as e-mail, the internet, and even faxes. In particular, the disenfranchised populations may not have access to information disseminated only through these technologies.

What level and kind of staff support is required?

Not surprisingly, the answers to this question varied both by the size of the geographic area the organization sought to mobilize and by the approach to mobilization (e.g., personal mobilization takes more staff than using the media). The participant from San Francisco felt that they needed at least four; the participant from Philadelphia felt that they needed twelve. One participant suggested that the number of organizers needed would depend on the goal and the issue. But there was a consensus that both child advocacy organizations and foundations tremendously underestimate the resources needed to be successful.

A consensus did develop that community organizing, in its traditional sense, requires so many resources that organizing across even a small state would be impossible. Child advocates in state-based organizations have therefore developed alternate approaches to constituency mobilizing, including working with established grass-roots organizations, developing state-wide networks and campaigns, and media approaches targeting sympathetic voters.

Most participants agreed that constituency building is a matter of developing personal relationships--whether in the form of community organizing or mobilizing already organized communities. By its nature, this form of community organizing is, therefore, staff and time intensive. A few participants, however, were working to try to develop constituencies using media such as print and television, and relying less upon personal relationships. (See Florida and Massachusetts.)

Participants broke down the staff support needed by function. They included data base maintenance, resource development, and constituency building (organizing). Some organizations have one person filling the first two roles. There was also some debate over whether the organizers should organize around a particular issue--in which case they usually end up working on the issue and not really organizing--or do organizing unrelated to a particular issue--which may not be as effective.

However, everyone agreed that there were never enough resources available to do organizing thoroughly, and that therefore strategic choices were necessary to be as effective as possible. One organization stretches its organizing capacity by requiring board members to make at least two presentations a year, on topics of their choice to audiences of their choice.

Another way to break down staff duties is by thinking about three roles for a child advocacy organization: public action, public information, public policy. This approach leads to the conclusion that child advocacy organizations also need a policy analyst, a political director who can decide what to do and when to do it, and a communications staffer that can work with the media and provide message development. Some organizations fill the media function with a board member, volunteer or contractor; the political director probably needs to be day in and day out and therefore housed within the organization. For many child advocacy organizations, the executive director fills this role. However, the executive director may have a background in the substantive issues affecting children and may not have sufficient experience in the political arena to function as political director.

At least two participants' organizations have deliberately separated the information role from the political leadership role, so that one organization fills the informational role and a partner fills the political leadership role. It was suggested that there is an institutional advantage in splitting these jobs between two people, or even between two affiliated organizations. Advocates often need to take controversial positions while political strategists often need to form coalitions. If the child advocacy group has both a political director and a policy advocate, or even a political wing and a policy wing, it may be possible to cut across political lines to form coalitions or to reach a broad base of voters, without antagonizing coalition partners or voters because of a policy stance, (particularly if, for example, the political director is perceived publicly as distinct from the policy advocate). But good communications between the two is essential.

Where there is only one organization, not two affiliated ones, one organization's approach to reaching a broad constituency has been to pick a lead issue that is strong enough to pull swing districts, and to have the executive director be the spokesperson on that issue. A separate person carried the banner for a secondary and more controversial issue. Thus the broad constituency for the primary issue was less likely to get upset by the advocacy for the more controversial second issue. For similar reasons, one organization often uses volunteers as spokespeople, while another uses program people.

Additional functions which should be included in a broad constituency campaign include someone who works with volunteers and a technology support person. There was some debate over the extent to which policy development must be handled with in the organization. It was suggested that policy materials can be obtained from national organizations and local experts and then reworded as necessary. But other participants felt that policy capacity in house and the production of policy papers was critical to their role.

How do you sustain constituent involvement?

There wasn't a consensus on this point. One group of participants felt strongly that it was important to have a broad message that didn't become too political, or lose potential partners, while another felt that strong positions on particular issues would win constituents who would stay with the organization for a long time, even when they might not agree with other positions the organization took down the road.

One participant suggested a model for constituent involvement of three concentric circles; the inner core circle, those who will be involved every time, can be small. The second circle, less active but concerned, are willing to engage in a "blip" of advocacy every year. (For example, one participant has a KIDS COUNT state-wide network that only becomes active once a year, when they release the KIDS COUNT book.)

The third and outermost ring only will get involved when a disaster is at hand--the sky is falling. The participants identified a range of ways in which constituents can act on behalf of children: communicate with your legislator on this issue, send the child advocacy organization a check, fill a room next week, talk to the media about policy or about your story, testify to legislators, tie donations for political campaigns to your interest in children.

There was a consensus that it wasn't necessary to get a lot of people to act all year long; that, in general, if you can get a lot of people to do one thing once a year, the impact lasts about a year.

It is also important to find an issue that really connects for people. One member found that people in her community were outraged by a proposal to move a museum from an accessible location; their campaign to keep the museum in its current location became a powerful constituency building tool.

Regular communications is important in sustaining a constituency, but it is also important to avoid overkill. One participant suggested asking members how often they wanted to hear from the organization. Other members suggested that an important element in sustaining a constituency is keeping communications a two-way street; using feed back questionnaires, membership surveys, and generally being open to comments.

How do we evaluate constituency building?

Participants agreed that evaluation is a perennial quandary for child advocates, and evaluating success in constituency building exemplifies the issues. Evaluations tend to look either at processes -- assessing whether certain projects were completed, for example -- or at outcomes -- assessing whether children's lives improved as a result of the child advocates' work. Both of these approaches present difficulties. While it is possible to identify process indicators for constituency building, process indicators do not reveal whether children are better off as a result. Outcome indicators, in theory, would reveal whether the work of child advocates had really improved children's lives. However, it is extremely difficult to trace the role of the child advocates in causing those outcomes.

Appropriate process indicators should be selected based on the constituency that the organization is trying to reach, and the approach that the organization has taken to reach them. Possible process indicators would include:

- Polls that assess whether the organization has increased its name recognition, and whether popular attitudes have shifted over the course of the organization's work. (This indicator would be particularly valuable for an organization that was attempting to build an electoral constituency);
- Growth in the organization's membership;
- Growth in funds raised from the constituency;
- The establishment of necessary organizational infrastructure, such as data bases and computerized online information;
- The number of meetings that have been held with constituencies;
- The number of trainings that have been provided to constituents;
- The number of rallies or other public events held, and the number of participants;
- The number of fieldworkers available for each geopolitical region, or for a given population size;
- Interviews with policy makers that documented an increase in contacts from the constituency.

One speaker pointed out that as well as providing a process indicator, the engagement of affected communities in the process can be an important outcome in itself; that is, that in addition to benefits for children, one desired outcome might be greater involvement of the community in making policies that affect the community.

For a variety of reasons, it is much more difficult to assess improvements in outcomes for children. Child advocates typically seek a particular policy change. An intermediate outcome might be the adoption of a new policy that the child advocate has worked for; a long-term outcome might be an improvement in children's lives as a result of the new policy. For example, success might be defined as the intermediate outcome of a percentage increase in the number of kids insured, but that outcome doesn't indicate whether the ultimate goal of better health for kids has been achieved. It is difficult to assess the child advocates' role in affecting both intermediate and ultimate outcomes. Any policy change requires a number of players; the importance of the child advocates' role can be hard to determine, and how it is assessed may depend largely on who provides the assessment. Furthermore, it is hard to figure out which factors, including the policy change, may have made a difference in the long-term indicator. Did kids' health improve because they had better health coverage, or because the economy improved and moved more kids out of poverty?

Outcomes indicators are also risky evaluation tools for advocates, because many components of those ultimate outcomes are beyond the control of child advocates. Part of the difficulty in evaluating substantive efforts of child advocacy organizations is that the political environment or other environmental factors can change, and is to a great extent outside their control. Advocates can find themselves planning a new initiative with specific outcome goals only to have to abandon it to defend policies they thought they had already secured or to address new and unanticipated emergencies. Success sometimes might be protecting old policies, rather than

gaining new ones. But under these circumstances, the advocacy will be measured against a set of outcomes which no longer apply. Similarly, new policies might not have the impact that advocates anticipated because of other intervening factors; an economic downturn might mean that even with greater health insurance coverage, kids are sicker than before the expanded coverage took effect. Thus, selecting outcomes indicators for evaluation of any child advocacy work presents significant difficulties.

Two points of consensus did arise. First, all the advocates agreed that they needed to develop more sophisticated approaches to evaluation; that it is critical to be able to tell whether they are doing a good job. Second, the advocates mentioned that the collaborative nature of their work made evaluation of their work particularly difficult. For child advocates, working collaboratively is necessary for success; in such collaborative efforts, it is often important not to identify the particular role of any one organization, or to claim responsibility for the success. When one organization does claim to have played a critical role, that may undermine the success of the coalition. In an evaluation, however, identifying an individual organization's role is necessary. (Identifying the impact of a particular organization can also be critical for fund raising and for building the constituency of the organization for future efforts.) Most participants agreed that they walked a tightrope between effective collaboration and seeking individual credit.

Conclusion

All the participants agreed that constituency building is valuable, if not critical, and that their efforts have been given new urgency by recent political developments. While child advocates have been able to achieve results for children by using their knowledge and expertise to advocate for policy changes, this role, by itself, is no longer considered sufficient (although it remains important). They acknowledged that building constituencies was a long-term, incremental process, but that the rewards could be enormous.

Underlying the discussion was a recognition that community mobilization efforts across states are difficult and cannot follow traditional organizing models. Many of the participants are trying new and innovative approaches to community mobilizing; their colleagues expressed great interest in learning how these approaches developed over time and whether they proved successful. There is also a history of successes within the child advocacy community, particularly at the local level, that should be shared and replicated. Participants identified two needs to support their work; a need for significant resources, and a need for models and approaches, developed by their colleagues and targeted specifically at building a constituency for children.

Appendix 1

Summaries of Constituency Building Efforts

Constituency Building Program Descriptions

During the first morning of the meeting, each participant described their program's constituency building efforts. These summaries both provide "best practice" approaches for other child advocates and illuminate many of the themes and questions discussed.

Agenda for Children (Louisiana): Speaking For and Spoken For

Louisiana's Agenda for Children (Agenda) conducts its constituency building efforts at two levels. One level is with advocates: service providers, community activists, United Way, the League of Women Voters. These are people who speak for others: typically they are middle class, white culture, "people like us". Another level of its constituency work is with people that are usually spoken for: communities of color, people who are poor, knowingly or unknowingly reaching for self-determination. Agenda has different objectives for each level of constituency building efforts.

For the advocates–the "speaking for"-- Agenda seeks to inform, enlighten and activate them, and also raise their awareness of the strong drive for self-determination among the "spoken for". With the "spoken for", Agenda seeks to support their self-determination in ways that demonstrate accountability, so that the "spoken for" frame and direct the agenda with the support of Agenda for Children. To mobilize communities most effectively, Agenda seeks to combine work with both communities. This requires the communities to develop a common understanding of institutional racism and the role that force plays in the dismal statistics that describe Louisiana's children.

Agenda for Children has made a conscious choice to mobilize the faithful among the "speaking for", and not convert the heathen; that is, it tries to get people who are already concerned about children to act, rather than to try to raise the level of concern among folk who have not demonstrated such concern. When working with the "speaking for", sometimes Agenda for Children sets a short term (one or two legislative sessions) agenda: thus issues might include creating a children's trust fund, child care licensing (a current issue is improving staff/child ratios), adopting a state Children's Health Insurance Program, obtaining a six month earned income disregard for welfare recipients. These are small changes but make a difference in people's lives.

With the "spoken for", the focus of Agenda's current efforts is to build relationships. Agenda developed its approach in a specific relationship with a community at their doorstep. For about eight years Agenda staff have been working with the public housing community throughout New Orleans. (See NACA's *Great Idea, "Town Meetings and Legislative Trainings in New Orleans' Public Housing."*) These communities are not readily comfortable with policy issues. Agenda was able to bring 5 busloads from this community to critical hearings at the state capitol. To do so, Agenda needed to build a relationship with the community, and learn Agenda's own accountability to the self-determination of oppressed communities.

This work is going well in New Orleans. Now Agenda's objective is to take this approach statewide. Agenda makes a point of going to communities at the invitation of groups who are part of the "spoken for" community: Head Start, Legal Services Client

Councils. Everyone else is welcome, (all the "spoken for" groups are invited) but Agenda has learned that who sets the table determines who sits down at the table. If a meeting is convened within the community, it is much more likely to draw the community.

One of Agenda's recent achievements was organizing an interfaith summit on kids in New Orleans. The theme is "As of December 21, what will happen to 22,000 kids in New Orleans." As a result of the summit, the School Board in New Orleans was approached with the suggestion that all commencement speakers should be requested to speak about welfare reform. Agenda has brought together Headstart and childcare programs, preschools and University early childhood programs, to discuss quality issues. Now this group has a specific agenda; they hope to raise public/private money to deal with some of these issues.

Agenda believes that real change must come from the bottom up; more traditional efforts are still vital but ultimately both must come together for success. This work is very tough. Relationships tend to fall apart when success is near. It is a long term struggle; it started before Agenda began and will continue after.

Agenda does develop an annual legislative agenda; it is a combination of what staff feel is important and what is possible. Agenda develops it with various partners. It is now starting an earned income tax credit effort which will be multi-year. Agenda pays an independent lobbyist and Judy Watts, Agenda's President/CEO, also does some of the legislative work. The "inner circle" that develops the legislative agenda is really two-part. There are 20 groups, but the core group includes four organizations: the National Association of Social Workers, the Health Care Coalition, a Maternal/Child Health group and Agenda for Children. These groups work well together and don't compete for funding. While the Welfare Rights Organization is not part of the group, it is Agenda's closest partner. Agenda cannot take bring "reform" proposals to the black community for support -- to them reform is reconstruction, and has very negative connotations. .

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Philadelphia Citizens for Children & Youth: Community Forums to Identify a Mobilizing Agenda

Philadelphia Citizens for Children & Youth (PCCY) finds that most of its community organizing successes are around issues; this means that its successes do not support the organization in its ongoing work.

PCCY has undertaken a number of community mobilization activities. One is its Campaign for Kids in which it held a series of forums every year throughout the city, asking what will make a difference in the lives of families and kids. Three to four years ago, the answer commonly was recreation: families wanted pools to open earlier and job applications for kids to be life guards made available much earlier in the process. PCCY launched a campaign with children circulating petitions. That year the pools opened early. Then the next piece was playground swings. PCCY launched a campaign to raise money for swings. One effort was for the holidays–Hannukah, Christmas or Kwanzaa–"give a neighborhood swings"; they also held a swing dance.

Then PCCY went back to the communities; the next issue identified was something for kids to do after school. PCCY was looking for broad issues, across incomes and not pathological – something everyone could identify with. So PCCY began to work to create after-school programing. To bring as many people as possible into the campaign, PCCY made sure there was a role for everybody–people could walk kids from schools to programs, work in the programs, raise money, talk to policy makers. In the poorest communities, it was most difficult to get them to believe anything would happen; in the first six months PCCY held lots of meetings but not much happened. PCCY decided it needed money to put on the table, so it raised money from corporations to serve as start up funds; that helped. PCCY did a video, posters, and a "home alone" campaign; the goal was to get people to be active advocates as well as help individual kids.

This year as a result of the aroused community awareness effort of PCCY, together with a lot of other people, results are showing. There is $1.2 million in the mayors' budget for after-school programs in Philadelphia (new dollars over last two years); 137 city programs plus an additional 40 school programs. There have been 3 city council hearings; there was an editorial campaign and national attention to issue. The state legislature is now considering a bill to appropriate $15 million statewide for youth development for after-school programs. PCCY helped craft this bill with members of the legislature. Now PCCY is also trying to connect the children in the after-school programs with health care insurance.

The forums also gave birth to another project, "play streets", as a response to the need for summer activities for kids. In this project PCCY assists "block captains" who had signed up to help distribute the summer lunch program. The neighbors close off streets

and distribute free lunch and develop activity programs for the kids that take place in the street. PCCY offers technical assistance, provide play streets leaders training, supports and some supplies.

This work brought a lot of people together, from providers to parents to policy people to funders. Most of the time PCCY's name did not appear, so these activities didn't build constituency for PCCY in the sense that the people involved in these activities don't identify with or belong to PCCY; also, PCCY is still just starting in getting these people to be advocates. One strength of this issue is that many constituencies want these programs: police, teachers, parents. It is even possible to "use" welfare reform to strengthen the case for these programs. While this is a good issue, the jury is still out on whether PCCY can turn it into an ongoing success.

PCCY is conducting its forums less frequently than annually, because agendas do not change that rapidly. The mechanics of setting up these forums include partnering with a host, usually a settlement house, youth or neighborhood group. PCCY tries to do them in each neighborhood, or in locations where people from several neighborhoods can walk to. They draw between 10 and 60 people; 20 is common. This permits PCCY to say to elected officials " We've been all over the city: in your district this is what people want" but it can be depressing when only a few people come. In all these cases, typical organizing strategies are welcome but spontaneity and flexibility is also critical and it is important to build from wherever the effort goes.

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Maryland Advocates for Children and Youth: Benchmarks and Action Networks

Two years ago, under a new Executive Director, ACY reviewed the status of kids in Maryland and their community mobilization strategy. At that point, ACY was a 10 year old organization which ran a collection of good projects but did not have an overall strategic approach. Maryland is one of the wealthiest states but Maryland's children were doing poorly. So ACY spent a summer looking at what organizations on the political right had done effectively. ACY concluded that these organizations had sophisticated communications and government relations strategy. They were successful in getting out the vote, in part because they got to the churches and appeared to have morality on their side. They cut across race, class and gender and promoted a few key issues. There was message discipline among the ranks.

Based upon this analysis, ACY decided to target specific measurable goals. It picked the five most egregious KIDS COUNT results for Maryland. ACY chose reasonable improvement goals–designed to be meaningful but achievable -- for example, reduce child poverty by 5%, increase to 70% the number of 9 year olds able to read. These goals are a real stretch but give a name to the point on the horizon ACY wants to reach. ACY did an environmental analysis: what supports for these goals were already there, who agreed on what needed to be done. For its first campaign, it chose to work intensively to adopt a Maryland Children's Health Insurance Plan (CHIP). ACY held public forums, demonstrations, press conferences, polling, created packets for all legislators with district specific information, testified, requested local health department information as a tool for getting them involved. The next target will be after-school care programs.

One of ACY's conclusions was that much coalition work is unfocused; that the coalition loses people if the coalition is not focused on their organization's agenda. ACY redesigned their coalition work. Now it has six specific issue coalitions in various areas for ongoing work: tracking policy development, implementation and monitoring. For example, it now has a health care group working independently on managed care. These groups, which have five or ten people, keep on top of their issue. This is independent of the lead issue for each year. Now ACY has only 6 working groups on key issues, where it used to work on many more areas.

As a result of this programmatic review, ACY decided to launch the Children's Action Network (MD CAN). This is an umbrella coalition of many organizations; ACY is just the convener. Thirty organizations paid $500 each for start up costs-- they faxed out information very broadly and it was redistributed. The goal was to get 50 people in each legislative district (Maryland has 47) who would respond to alerts about legislation and policy choices. The primary question is how to build this network. The strategy has been to get one children's advocate from each community in each district--one teacher, one

doctor, one presbyterian, one parent.... ACY uses email and broadcast fax to send out alerts. This requires an administrative staffer to crank out the alerts, plus a mid-level policy person. It also requires extensive data base work; for example, at every forum ACY staff took the participants' list back and entered it into the data base.

ACY viewed the Children's Action Network as a vehicle for community mobilization; but for the first time in 10 years ACY got its entire legislative agenda passed, and its CHIP bill came through the legislative session in great shape. (One problem is that because the agenda is determined analytically by the umbrella organization, as opposed to by the network of members, people throughout Maryland do not feel ownership of this organization. To address this, ACY just held a Children's Convention. Three hundred fifty people came; all gubernatorial candidates came. Through "dotocracy" lead issues were picked by attendees–not just ACY or the issue coalitions.)

Some considerations influence the effectiveness of this approach. For policy change, 10,000 people may not be necessary; what may be needed is 30 people who will place a call at the key moment. "The perception of power is power itself." ACY also needed a big win to get the ball rolling. It is important to sort out what role the child advocacy organization will play – convener or leader. It is important to think about how much time the child advocacy organization can afford to put into a coalition for which it is not funded but does the work; when there is a success everybody takes credit.

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Massachusetts Committee for Children and Youth: Using the Media to Build a Citizens' Constituency for Children

MCCY has a new initiative: Massachusetts Campaign for Children. MCCY had been doing advocacy as an organization of 25 board experts, whose strength lay in knowledge, not in the community. Recently MCCY decided that this was insufficient; it needed a committed army. After the Stand for Children, in 1996, with a coalition of allied organizations, it launched a new constituency building effort. As part of its participation in the Campaign for Children, MCCY targeted its KIDS COUNT reports for citizen consumption– they are now smaller and focused on specific issues.

MCCY has now begun a new effort to grow and energize the Campaign for Children. At the moment, it has nearly 1,000 members. It has developed a web site, which includes KIDS COUNT reports, legislative updates, etc[1].

The new organizational drive focuses on money, membership and media. MCCY has tried to identify media and corporate partners, with some success. So far, the *Boston Globe* has given about $150,000 worth of free advertising, with an additional $50,000 expected in the fall, and some production assistance. The *Globe* logo appears on the bottom of the ad, and it was put on the Globe corporate web site. MCCY has also developed a partnership with the Boston Parents' Paper. Under the agreement, MCCY will write a column bimonthly which will include an ad for the Campaign; there will also be feature stories profiling the Campaign. MCCY believes that it is now primed to go to corporate sponsors.

With this media exposure MCCY plans to use KIDS COUNT as its educational arm. It recently completed "Working and Still Poor"; a piece on child care, "Who's Minding the Children?" and a report on the child protection system will be issued this fall. MCCY also paid for a poll that covered a wide range of children's issues. (This poll was conducted by university faculty who are interested in helping MCCY develop its own polling capacity). MCCY believes that there are three major media stories that can be developed using this poll, and hopes to get three sets of media "hits" from it. MCCY will also use it as a basis for briefing editorial boards and candidates, and for a fall candidate questionnaire.

Some of the choices that MCCY made in structuring the Campaign for Children were difficult. For example, it will be nonpartisan and will not lobby. MCCY will lead people right to the water: "Contact your legislator now and let them know how you feel." (MCCY will continue to advocate.) But the Campaign needed to be non-partisan in order

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[1] Additional information on the Massachusetts Campaign for Children is available at **www.kidscampaigns.org**; click on Campaign 98, and then on "kidscampaigns highlights state campaigns".

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to attract media partners, e.g. the *Boston Globe* (and, probably, some of the other corporations they are approaching.)

MCCY is trying to reach student councils to form a Kids Convention; it hopes candidates will show up for an additional media hit.

The vision for MCCY in the twenty-first century includes a policy department that develops its annual Children's Agenda; KIDS COUNT, which will be a polling, survey research and data center; and a child advocacy training institute to sustain the community advocates that they hope to build through the Campaign. MCCY is seeking funding for a pilot project in Dorchester, to be repeated in 17 other communities. One of the other issues MCCY is working through is the need to turn the office into a technologically advanced information center.

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Florida's Children's Campaign: Building Electoral Strength for Child Advocates

In 1992 the Center for Florida's Children established the Florida's Children's Campaign. At the moment, the Campaign is housed within the Center for Florida's Children as part of its corporate structure; however it is an affiliate structure with its own decision-making authority and State Campaign Committee (its governing board) and staff. It has a separate budget–$300,000 per year, the same size as the Center. The sole mission of the Children's Campaign is to create a political environment where kids' needs come first. This organization exists to make advocates more effective. Campaign staff are not as well versed in the issues and can't articulate all the issues; that role is for the Center for Florida's Children. The campaign does the political work necessary to create the political support for the positions that Florida's Children espouses. Their vision is that when advocates walk down the halls of the Florida capitol, instead of having doors slammed, legislators will reach out to grab them saying "boy do I need to talk to you".

The strategy of the Children's Campaign is to target swing voters. For example, out of 100,000 adults, 30% don't vote, so the Campaign doesn't worry about them. Of the remaining 70%, the frequent voter base is about 30% or 21,000 per 100,000, and that is the group to whom much of the Campaign's work is addressed. This has a huge impact on everything they do. Because Florida is a closed primary system, as few as 10,000 of the 21,000 voters may have a meaningful say in who represents them in the Capitol.

Florida is huge -- it has 8 million registered voters, and 3.4 million kids. One of the Campaign's goals is to get the frequent campaign contributors involved. It wants the frequent campaign contributors to say, when they make a donation, "I am giving you this money because of your position on kids." The Campaign has designed stickers that fit on checks that say "I'm for kids and I vote" which it will urge people to use these on campaign contribution checks. The Campaign will say "we know you are writing campaign checks; please use this sticker when you do." It also will send them to politicians. The Campaign has a state-wide data base which includes the top 5,000 political contributors. This information was downloaded from the Secretary of State's Elections On-Line web site. (This required some computer work on the Campaign's part to make the information usable.)

The Campaign is playing to three groups: frequent voters, campaign contributors, and community leaders. Sixty-five percent of all voters live in the 10 largest counties, 80 % in the 20 largest. In every county 300-500 people seem to be the most influential. A database which includes those 500 people in 20 counties needs to hold only 10,000 names--a doable number.

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The Campaign works to find messages that resonate with all three groups. It picks three issues that will play well with the media and in the capitol. The last legislative session was great for kids -- it wiped out the child care waiting list; got a children's health insurance program; got $34 million for two hundred more child abuse investigators (2 years after eliminating 30 slots); $600 million total in new funds for kids.

Picking the three issues was a two year process using polling information, focus groups and 8 regional community action days. Each region chose, but the results were the same; parent training and support-- (the Campaign's translation of the solution for the problem defined by the attitude that the problem with kids is parental responsibility); child care -- early readiness -- and after school; and vocational education and job preparedness. In resolving the last issue, on its own, the Florida legislature would look only at college, but this is insufficient. Only 30% of high school graduates are enrolled full-time in college a year after graduation -- are the rest getting the job skills and training they need? The voters that the Campaign is targeting are often people who moved from the industrial belt in the Northeast -- they know that Florida's vocational education system needs significant expansion and improvement. It also addresses voters' concerns that children who aren't in school and don't have a good job are the ones most likely to commit crimes.

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Alabama Partnerships for Children -- Starting a 501(c)(4)

This brand new organization started in January 1998. The Partnership began building its membership with direct service providers affiliated with the Children Trust Fund. The membership building process was very successful with more than 200 members within two months. However, the membership is very impassioned–but not political. Currently, to broaden the base of support in order to run a "Kids Campaign", community leaders, voters, and candidates are being targeted for their involvement. As a 501(c)(4) organization it will be easier to take on the extremely right wing conservative contention in Alabama. The influential politicos are met with to educate them as to the personal benefit of supporting candidates for kids. The organizational premise is that candidates for kids will be legislators for kids. The Partnership will pick four or five candidates from both parties to support in the general election. They will be chosen based on candidate score cards, legislative record and their stand on children's issues. Susan Kynes, the Executive Director, thinks that this work will help child advocates during the legislative session. Grass roots, door-to-door canvassing will be done by the direct service membership. Impacting a few races will send a message to the elected officials that Alabamians expect children to become a political priority. If not, they may not be re-elected.

This organization works in collaboration with NACA member Voices for Alabama's Children; Voices does the legislative work, the Partnership does the electoral work.

Coleman Advocates for Children (San Francisco): Rooted in Constituency Building

In 1975 Coleman Advocates for Children started as angry meetings in people's living rooms; this origin still colors the organization for which constituency building is a theme. In the 1980's, they started talking about constituency building to foundations. In 1991 they were successful in getting a children's amendment added to the city charter which dedicates 2½ % of the City's property tax to kids. Recently they did a poll to determine the name recognition level of Coleman Advocates. They were expecting recognition somewhere between 3 and 10%; instead, 53% of San Francisco residents recognized their name. (This level of recognition and effectiveness has drawbacks; the mayor's office pulled something from the budget that they really wanted for kids, knowing Coleman would get it back.)

Coleman has found no magic bullet and no one way to do community mobilization and advocacy; what works for them is just sustained activity over time until people say that Coleman is really there, it never shuts up. One thing that even makes this possible is San Francisco's size; by comparison, Philadelphia, which is larger, is harder. The goal is power for kids – to make kids' issues as powerful as those of the police and the chamber of commerce. The organization must be sustainable because the need will never end -- there will always be children.

The work requires a lot of entertainment and advertising – a cookies campaign will be great one year and terrible the next – so it's important to keep changing. Constituency building is always a factor in deciding what Coleman will do: a key question is always "will people get mobilized". As a result of asking this question when Coleman sets priorities, it has dropped foster care from its priorities but includes dog droppings in parks. One part of the formula is regularly-paced public events that people can participate in, e.g. Stand for Children, an advocacy fair; the focus is to have a nice day in the park and then speak out on an important issue. So one year Coleman held a baby brigade: "come with your strollers to demonstrate about child care". Coleman has also held a children's legislative day in City Hall. Coleman advertises in public media as broadly as possible.

One approach Coleman pioneered for developing "foot soldiers" (community child advocates) is a leadership training group with stipends. Coleman has both a youth leadership and a parent leadership training group. Coleman is developing an underground parent network that can get out alerts: for example, "call this number if you hate school lunch" – with capacity to staff tables in public spaces and create youth materials. There is a parents' group obsessed with the quality of school lunch – this was not on Coleman's agenda but the parents did a great mobilizing job. The goal is to be able to reach 1000 parents quickly.

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Coleman has stopped producing reports. It creates 1 and 2 pagers for real people; cards with phone numbers of elected officials; slate cards as well as vote cards. It takes positions on issues e.g. the bond for a museum. It never lets an election pass: Coleman holds candidate forums, submits candidate questionnaires, gets news about kids in the newspaper. Coleman is constantly in coalitions but never permanent coalitions. Coleman uses the media a lot but is cautious about using only the media. It is becoming a formal membership organization: members will get a card; there will be rigorous membership goals; members will get perks from local businesses. Coleman does constant outreach with churches, etc.; it does extensive data base maintenance; it tracks who is interested in specific issues. Coleman doesn't do global newsletters; the newsletters have one issue with an action requested, sometime only a postcard.

Coleman has learned that people identify at the local level -- they will call the mayor before Sen. Feinstein, they will call about dog droppings before welfare. Coleman is a hybrid organization–sometimes top down, sometimes bottom up, sometimes working an organizational agenda, sometime the community's; some people want the policy analysis, others want not to be told–they want to tell Coleman Advocates what to do. Coleman finds it is important to be very outspoken; people don't identify with mush. People want a position. People still tell her they remember her positions from 10 years ago on issues like a fight against alcohol in the stadium, the park report card, or their work getting zoo fees reduced. Once the organization wins people they are with you–you don't have to have agreement on everything.

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Association for Children of New Jersey: Training Course for Community Advocates

There is a difference between the city and the state perspective; ACNJ is not really doing community organizing – it is doing community outreach to build a grass roots constituency. ACNJ can do some constituency building on the state level, but this is challenging because New Jersey is highly diverse–it has beaches, mountains, farms, suburbs. A lot of times people will come to ACNJ because it has the experts on a given issue; the people who come to it feel ACNJ needs to put aside whatever issue it is working on to support the group that has sought their assistance. That is a challenge.

ACNJ moved into mobilizing and building communities about 3-4 years ago. Over the past three years it implemented the community orientation course as a form of community outreach. As a state wide organization, most of its attention is on legislative issues and lobbying. ACNJ is also a membership organization: individuals can be a member for a small price. Members get an information newsletter and action alerts on issues that ACNJ is addressing. In the past ACNJ has also held annual conferences for members.

ACNJ's primary community mobilization strategy is to offer a Community Orientation Course. It had used this model some years before and now has reactivated it[2]. This course provides basic education around kids's issues. ACNJ decides what issues to address. Once the course is over, then ACNJ provides technical assistance for graduates' advocacy efforts. The basic mission of the course is to raise awareness and stimulate action -- the course is kept general because this permits advocates to try many approaches and strategies. Historically it has covered the process of coalition building. Usually it also includes short term issues that ACNJ is working on. It is mostly issue driven. Through the Community Leadership course, ACNJ is working directly with grassroots groups, parents. It raises awareness, provides education, trains parents and children on how to be child advocates as well as how to volunteer for effective agencies.

So far ACNJ has provided the course in three cities: Camden, Trenton, Newark. Participants include teens, parents, seniors, persons of faith, college students. The most recent version of the course included six sessions over a six month period; the first session was an overview, then four sessions covered specific issues such as AIDS and Head Start. The last session, called "Doing Something", was designed to offer approaches for people to act on their new knowledge. Then there is a graduation ceremony.

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[2] Editor's note: a number of other NACA members have recently begun to develop similar community leadership courses. NACA has information on some of these programs; they vary in structure, timing, and expectations of graduates, among other items.

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ACNJ hopes in the fall to bring the graduates together in a statewide meeting to begin to talk about where they will move to next. Rather than mobilize them around specific issues, so far ACNJ has given the course participants the information and then let them determine how they might act in their communities. It does make participants aware of ACNJ's agendas.

This is one of four levels in which ACNJ works with community partners–the other three include teen mentoring, a stake holders group, and a parent training network. Some of the lessons learned: it is important to gain community perspectives; to work issues both top down and bottom up; strength in numbers matters; for so long ACNJ has forced its own agenda but now there is two-way communication.

ACNJ is learning and adapting as it implements the course – there is no vision of the year 2000. Most importantly it wants that mass of people. ACNJ is unable to provide funding to community partners. The motive for participation by trainees is that they can tap into ACNJ resources and information. There are no official memos of agreement; ACNJ is trying to build an informal relationship–"friend raising".

ACNJ does utilize the "glossy stuff"; in particular, they produce a Newark KIDSCOUNT report in addition to their state report. They want to add cities.

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North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute: Public Policy, Public Information and Public Action

North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute (NCCAI) has chosen a strategic division of responsibilities to strengthen its community mobilization efforts. Through an ongoing organizational development process, the Institute has focused its work in three specific areas: public policy, public information and public action.

The majority of the Institute's policy work is done through coalition, leaving the Institute flexible to address issues behind the scenes or on an as needed basis. As a result of welfare reform changes beginning in 1994, the Institute joined forces with an arm of Legal Services of North Carolina (now known as the NC Justice and Community Development Center), and the NC Council of Churches to form the Covenant with North Carolina's Children. Today this coalition has a membership of over 80 statewide organizations including the Pediatric Society, PTA, etc. The Covenant has a formal leadership structure and operates within a set of by-laws. There are seven issue groups that meet independently between the monthly meeting dates. Covenant members self-select the issue group(s) they wish to join -- Health, Safety, Juvenile Justice, Child Welfare and Protection, Early Childhood, Education, or Economic Security and Welfare Reform. Each workgroup identifies two broad-based issues for review by the full membership. The goal is to select issues that everyone can support, or at least not publicly oppose. The 14-point legislative agenda is voted on by the Covenant membership and is disseminated statewide to members of Covenant organizations. Theoretically, more than 500,000 members can be mobilized if each organization spreads the word.

NCCAI supports the coalition by loaning its own lobbyist to the Covenant. NCCAI houses the lobbyist and pays her salary, and reaps the benefit of greatly expanded exposure to the issues and to additional constituents. . Lobbyists for other Covenant organizations work to support the efforts of the Covenant's chief lobbyist. Attendance at Covenant meetings is excellent, with information sharing and strategizing as two key elements of the meetings. Each organization has a communications tree to reach its membership. The lobbyist sends out a Friday update to each of the Covenant organizations, and also sends alerts and timely editorials from city newspapers across the state. NCCAI maintains an additional email list to reach other advocates recruited at NCCAI functions. The Covenant's alerts are copied and distributed to this list each Friday. The success of the communications efforts is documented and the Covenant is making great progress with its legislative agenda.

By having the Covenant as the lead organization for public policy issues, NCCAI is free to concentrate on additional issues. Much policy work is done behind the scenes by the Institute's President, Jonathan Sher and selected, influential friends of the Institute.

In more than twenty counties, there are groups that "have some glowing embers left" from the Institute's KIDS COUNT constituency building effort. The strongest of these are those that had the most intensive personal relationship with NCCAI. One lesson that might be drawn from this is not to get too big too fast -- make sure that the groups you do work with are strong and have the capability of sustaining themselves once the organizing effort is complete. County level groups have difficulty locating financial resources and staff to keep functioning. NCCAI has supported some of the local groups by providing ongoing training and technical assistance, and has provided funds for expanded electronic networking.

NCCAI will conduct several focus groups this winter about local child advocacy. Some of the questions that NCCAI will seek answers for include:

- Who are these child advocates?
- What makes them child advocates?
- What do they do in terms of speaking or acting on behalf of children?
- What outcomes do they achieve – changing policies, making services for children better, public education?
- How do they define advocacy? Do they see themselves as child advocates?
- What would they like to strengthen, increase, improve in terms of their own advocacy efforts?
- What do they need to achieve more effective – for example, if an answer is training, what should the training focus on?
- Or if the answer is information, what type of information and how would they use it?
- What can NCCAI offer to them to help them achieve more effective advocacy?
- Do these child advocates feel isolated? Do they feel they are working alone? If so, what would they need to not feel isolated?
- What could NCCAI offer to them to help them obtain these things?

Now that NCCAI has divested itself (at least publicly) of the political function, it has concentrated on strengthening its other two pillars of work: public information and public policy. NCCAI received a one-time appropriation from the NC General Assembly to develop an information clearinghouse on children's issues. Acceptance of the funds has not hurt the Institute's ability to speak out for children in the governmental sector. In fact, it has strengthened its bipartisan relationships. With the $250,000 appropriation, the Institute increased its data gathering capacity and established a permanent home for the Institute within walking distance of the General Assembly. Legislators and staff are encouraged to use the Institute's data resources. Additionally, the Institute established a web site with links to other state and national organizations. The Covenant for North Carolina's Children shares the web space. NCCAI is a Benton Foundation state reporter.

Because NCCAI staff are generalists, a Council of Advisors was formed to serve as auxiliary staff. Initially paid a small stipend, the advisors now serve in a voluntary

capacity. The advisors have agreed to inform NCCAI of new developments in their areas of expertise and in turn the advisors have access to Institute data and resources.

The Institute has made a strategic choice to create public messages that can gain widespread support. For example, in November 1998, NCAII will release a publication titled, *"Keeping America's Promise to NC's Children."* This set of stories about real children in North Carolina was developed to create ownership and mobilize new advocates.

NCCAI continues to restructure its Public Action initiatives. Two specific activities are the development of a statewide foster/adoptive parent association and a statewide foster/adoptive youth association. Both of these efforts sprung from the Families for Kids initiative and are being supported by the State Division of Social Services. These two efforts are creating a growing grassroots network of child welfare advocates.

In 1996, NCCAI made the decision to suspend operation as a membership organization. Rather than focus on a general membership, NCCAI is contemplating the creation of a new membership structure for individuals that serve in a professional advocacy capacity or are active volunteers for children. This area will be further defined in 1999.

The Institute is currently developing a plan for strengthening its relationship with county-based advocacy organizations. Following two years of periodic retreats and discussions, the five independent county-based organizations and NCCAI are proposing a joint initiative. Using Search Institute's Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth initiative as its framework, the advocacy network is exploring grant opportunities to support staff in each of the five local organizations. The staff will direct the local HC•HY initiative but will also participate in policy and data efforts.

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Citizens for Missouri's Children: Using Information and Technology to Mobilize for Children

Three years ago, Citizens for Missouri's Children undertook a year-long strategic planning effort. They decided that their goal was to make Citizens for Missouri's Children bigger, stronger, more powerful, and more visible in order to help kids. In order to do that, they decided they needed some key infrastructure. They have worked hard to diversify their fund-raising and build their technological capacity. They believe that the technology is what will support their efforts to be a truly state-wide organization–it will permit them to track and support members, increase their communications capacity.

They also decided that Citizens for Missouri's Children's role would be a source of really good information for kids: CMC would use it and help others use it. CMC views the KIDS COUNT data book as a mobilizing tool. It raises their visibility and credibility; it opened the door for CMC to be expert in other areas of data collection and analysis. They have developed ELIOT (a web site and information system); Early Learning Information Online Together. They want to establish similar sites for health care, and education. CMC is building everything around their chosen role as a center for public information and advocacy: fund-raising, marketing plan, agenda for kids, materials for communities. They have chosen this route in part because they believe that the perception of power leads to power. They have also decided that they must not be distracted--if an activity doesn't lead to this goal don't do it.

This strategy requires several kinds of outreach. First, they need to go after those who are out there and want to be involved with the kinds of work CMC does; if someone buys a publication, or has any contact, their name and information goes in the data base. Second, they have established the assembly for children and families. It started as a coalition. A steering committee of 20 groups met and designed the assembly four years ago, as a multi-issue organization, with an agenda around welfare reform. The Assembly itself is now something of a burden; CMC puts on two meetings a year about public policy for policy makers and analysts. CMC develops an agenda with this multi-issue group, adopts it at the fall meeting. Building the agenda is fairly grueling; CMC staff meet with various groups to develop a survey that goes to 5000 people. They get 2000 back.

Using this survey, CMC created a draft agenda for kids with five major points, and then adopted it at the fall assembly. Assembly participants got the draft at registration, worked it over and adopted it. For CMC, the agenda is important but their role is more important. CMC doesn't work on every issue; they work on the issues that others won't take on.

The third approach to outreach is that CMC works with the Family Investment Trust. The FIT is the state's public/private partnership to promote services integration and devolution of some decision making to communities. They help communities by building their capacity and assisting with planning. CMC plans to work with the FIT to build the capacity of communities to participate in state level policy development. They have fourteen partnerships and 100 neighborhood sites where they will do the training and capacity building. CMC is not paid for undertaking this work.

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Michigan's Children: Building a Statewide Organization

Michigan's Children is a relatively young organization; it was started in 1992, and the current director joined the organization only two years ago. It has a corporate board, so they spend a lot of time educating the board about the role of advocacy. The board does provide a unique perspective. Michigan's Children's role in the state is also shaped in part by the presence of other advocacy-based organizations.

Thus, Michigan's Children currently has a project perspective, although it is now working to move away from this approach. It has five projects currently, all of which have three components – policy, information, and constituency building. The first two projects, a Budget project and a Devolution project, work together. It has produced two annual reports. The first annual report focused on systems reform. The state had developed locally-based "multi-purpose collaborative bodies" to help administer programs at the local level. The second report focused on getting Michigan's children ready for school–it raised issues about education and prevention and early intervention.

Michigan's Children aiso serves as the fiduciary for Michigan's Campaign for Children. This Campaign is similar to others described above but it is much more directed at parents. Other organizations on the steering committee include the League of Women Voters, the maternal and child health groups. They try to get the community groups to adopt electoral platforms; it largely has an education component.

Michigan's Children also have a Kidspeak project, through which it holds youth forums (three so far). At these forums, young people testify before legislators. Not only does this provide excellent public relations, it also gives kids exposure to testifying. Michigan's Children hopes to build some relationships that are more continuous--the "three o'clock lobby". Also, to alert corporations to what is happening to kids, it holds business roundtables with businesses and kids.

Finally, Michigan's Children works with the Michigan League for Human Services on KIDS COUNT. It wanted to go beyond the data book to do community advocacy, by taking it on the road. It shows how to use data on the local level. Michigan's Children maintains a database of city and county level data.

Some of the questions Michigan's Children grapples with include: How do you create capacity to meet community needs? What are you adequately able to give community so there is a true partnership without overinvesting in these groups? How do you offer skills around advocacy? How do you translate indicators into expected outcomes – without numbing everyone by an overload of data.

The philosophy behind its approach to communities is not here's our agenda, join it, but what's your agenda and do we fit in?

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Kansas Action for Children: Planning for a Constituency

When Kansas Action for Children's director first joined, KAC was in some financial difficulties. Nevertheless, he chose to do no significant fund-raising for the first 6 months. He took that time to figure out what should be the strategic focus and core activities of KAC's work. He talked to about 200 people. He concluded that KAC needed to do better what they had been doing for years: paint the picture of child well being and advance policy and program alternatives. But KAC also needed to do something it had not focused on in the past: broaden the base of citizen advocacy for children.

For "paint the picture", KAC has started a new project: a report card – which includs an evaluative piece that KIDS COUNT doesn't do -- on children's health very broadly defined. In the first year there will be one report card for the state as a whole, and in the second year KAC will add regional reports cards. In the effort to advance alternatives, KAC decided to develop a much more focused policy agenda, with three main themes -- CHIP, money for early childhood, EITC.

The third leg –"broaden the base" – is the focus of this discussion. KAC wants to get beyond the usual suspects of service advocates to groups such as Rotarians, churches. In comparison with other organizations at the meeting, KAC is in a different stage of the process. At the time of the May, 1998 Kansas City meeting KAC was in the last phase of a year-long planning process on how to build a constituency for children.

The short term objective is to write a strategic plan for broadening the constituency base for kids in Kansas. KAC's goals include: 1) many more people working with and for kids--not just on policy but also in everyday life; 2) many more people working on policy, including program administration and regulation; 3) shape public dialogue around the well being of all youth; 4) measurable improvements in child well being.

As part of the planning process, KAC has worked with many of the groups it seeks to draw into a broader constituency base, trying to identify what it would like to have happen. These groups included the early education community, League of Women's voters, and religious groups. It has also worked to develop its communication structures, including a web site, legislative update blast email (with link for email to policy maker embedded in the fax) and broadcast fax. KAC is trying to build a comprehensive data base, including everyone from chiefs of police, magistrates, church members.

KAC has learned lessons through this planning process. When it worked for an open inclusive process, the people KAC was trying to reach respected this attitude but needed and expected KAC to take a leadership role. The planning process itself has been good for KAC: it broadened its network and visibility.

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ROLE OF NACA IN SUPPORTING CONSTITUENCY EFFORTS

There was general agreement that funding for this work was essential (every approach mentioned required resources) and that NACA had a role to play in developing financial support. One of the key issues for developing financial support was how to do constituency building effectively in ways that have demonstrable outcomes directly linked to the child advocacy group. Many foundations want to see tangible outcomes. However, most participants' approaches required working in coalitions. It is difficult to work well in a coalition and still stand apart enough that the organization can take credit for the outcome. How can NACA or its member organizations demonstrate the "value added" by the organization's participation, without alienating coalition members who saw the work as a team effort? It was suggested that it is important to challenge, head on, the suggestion that one intervention should be able to cure all the effects of poverty – that if you have given all this money and people are still poor, it is ok to stop giving. While there is nothing wrong with showing success, it is naive to think that if all great programs were funded that would solve the problems.

One role NACA may be able to play is developing message and maintaining message discipline. It is important to identify which prize our eyes are on–to make a national effort not 100 efforts in 50 states.

Appendix 2

Web Sites of Participating Organizations

Web Sites of Participating Organizations

Coleman Advocates For Children & Youth	**http://thecity.sfsu.edu/~coleman**
Florida Children's Campaign	**www.floridakids.com**
Kansas Action for Children	**www.kac.org**
Agenda for Children	**www.usakids.org/sites/afc.html**
Advocates for Children and Youth	**www.acy.org**
Massachusetts Committee for Children and Youth	**www.masskids.org**
Michigan's Children	**www.michiganschildren.org**
Citizens for Missouri's Children	**www.umsl.edu/~cmc/**
Association for Children of New Jersey	**www.acnj.org**
North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute	**www.ncchild.org**
Philadelphia Citizens for Children & Youth	**ppccy@aol.com**